



Bergen County, Where America Begins

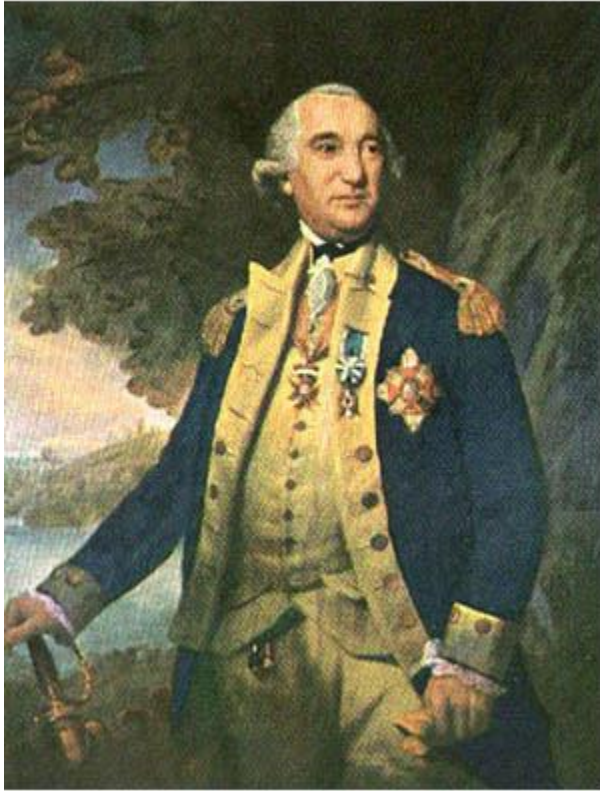
FRIEDRICH WILHELM VON STEUBEN

Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben was born in the fortress town of Magdeburg on September 17, 1730, a son of Royal Prussian Engineer, Lt. Baron Wilhelm von Steuben, and his wife, Elizabeth von Jagvodin. He entered the Prussian army in 1746 as lance-corporal. Major Friederich von Steuben became a general staff officer and aide-de-camp to Frederick the Great in 1761 during the Seven Years' War and was wounded in battle on the Russian front. After the demobilization of 1763, he secured the post of Grand Marshall in the court of the Prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingen. In 1769 he was awarded the Order of Fidelity, an honorary knighthood, by the Margrave of Baden. French War Minister, Count de St. Germain, introduced him to American ambassador, Benjamin Franklin, who arranged his passage to the United States. Baron von Steuben offered his services "as a Volunteer" to the American Congress in December 1777 and is best remembered for organizing and training the Continental troops at Valley Forge. He was commissioned Inspector-General on May 5, 1778. He retired from military service in March 1784. Major-General Baron von Steuben died at Remsen, Oneida County, New York, on November 28, 1794.



BARON VON STEUBEN. With Particulars Regarding His Jersey Estate

By Kevin W. Wright



There is no doubt in my mind that the Steuben House still graces the willowy banks of the Hackensack only because of a vague but very real association with its namesake: the legendary Prussian Drillmaster, Baron von Steuben. The image of him gruffly instructing a dispirited and tattered citizen-soldiery on the snowy wastes of Valley Forge has filtered through the imagination of many a schoolchild and become engraved in our national iconography. Regrettably Steuben's association with this historic property can not be neatly encapsulated in modern "sound-bites". The matter has been hopelessly muddled both by wishful thinking and by dour skepticism. How many times have I heard that the Baron "never took possession of the property" or

even worse, that he "turned his nose up at it!" In fact, the Steuben House may have been Steuben's best and perhaps only true reward for services rendered during our Revolutionary struggle.

The Bergen County Historical Society's interest in the Baron's estate at New Bridge was first expressed by William Alexander Linn who read a paper devoted to this topic at the Society's

annual dinner on Washington's Birthday, 1904. Linn's research is entirely honest and his text well worth reading today. Matters took a turn for the worse, however, in January of 1931, when Mrs. Frances A. Westervelt, dean of local historians and curator of the Bergen County Historical Society, publicly proclaimed that the "Steuben House Was Not Steuben's." It was her solemn opinion that the old Zabriskie homestead at New-Bridge was not built until after Steuben's death in 1794 and therefore had no association with him. She called a bill pending in the NJ legislature to provide \$75,000 for the reconstruction and maintenance of the Steuben House "a ridiculous waste of money." One of Mrs. Westervelt's claims was that the gambrel roof did not appear in Bergen County until the early nineteenth century. Fortunately, her opinions were contested and thoroughly

refuted by Miss Saretta Demarest of Teaneck who "offered masses of historical documents for proof as well as citing various features in the construction of the building which, she said, leaves no doubt as to the date of its erection." Her refutation was printed in the Bergen Evening Record on Tuesday, March 31, 1931.

At least a part of our fascination with this ancient landmark arises from a natural curiosity we have about the Revolutionary hero for whom it is named. I mentioned earlier that most school children encounter the Baron von Steuben briefly in their "social science" textbooks. Now I can readily see how a young student, condemned to seemingly endless hours of practicing multiplication-tables and cursive script, would easily be impressed by the image of an unyielding drill-sergeant. But otherwise I think we tend to prefer heroes that charge up hills with a saber clenched in their teeth to even the most efficient Inspector-generals. In a sense, General Steuben is the "Father of the American Military." The training and organization he brought to the army contribute substantially however discreetly to the final victory. In kitchen terms, he was the yeast that made the bread rise.

But there is more to it than that. First of all, until the latter half of the present century, Americans were somewhat ambivalent to "standing armies" and "professional soldiers" which many regarded as hazardous to the health of a democratic taxpayer. Secondly, I don't think that the idea of regimentation blends readily with the American creed of individuality.

Lastly and honestly, Baron von Steuben can be easily mistaken for the model of a Prussian militarist. Having fought two World Wars against Germany in this century, General Steuben's reputation may have suffered from the same anxieties in the American imagination that turned sauerkraut into Liberty Cabbage. And however high-minded his approach to the Congress in 1778, we must accept the fact that General Steuben was a soldier of fortune. But we must also accept the fact that he contributed immeasurably to the victory of our Revolutionary arms.

The Life of Friedrich Wilhelm Baron von Steuben

Friedrich Wilhelm Rudolph Gerhard Augustin von Steuben was born in Magdeburg, a fortress-town on the Elbe River. The birth registry of the local German Reformed church records his birth on September 17, 1730, as the son of Lt. Baron Wilhelm Augustin von Steube, a Royal Prussian Engineer-Lieutenant and his wife, Elizabeth Maria Justina Dorothea von Jagvodin. In later life, Baron Steuben was heard to say that he was not a Prussian by birth, but that his family owned a small estate at Weilheim, on the borders of Baden and Wurtemberg. His home was therefore in the historic region known as Swabia, situated in southwest Germany on the borders of Switzerland and Austria, which also included the Prussian province of Hohenzollern. The family's claim to nobility was concocted

by Steuben's grandfather, Augustin von Steuben, a country parson, who counterfeited a pedigree by conveniently using his surname to claim descent from an obscure branch of the ancient noble house of Steuben. This was done to further his own ecclesiastical prospects and to open careers in either the church or the military to his children. Such dishonest and designing behavior prefigured the modern art of padding a resume with faked academic credentials. Evidently it worked, since four sons of Augustin von Steuben and his wife, Countess Charlotte Dorothea von Effern, entered the Prussian army. Steuben's father, Wilhelm Augustin von Steuben, was a member of the engineering corps at a time when not much attention was paid by Central European armies to this particular branch of the service.

The soldier-king Frederick William I lavished his attention upon the Prussian army, turning it into an effective instrument of war by incessant drilling. He selected Augustin Wilhelm von Steuben from his corps of engineers to assist Anna Leopoldovna, Empress and Czarina of Russia, in the War of the Polish Succession (1733-1735). Friedrich Baron von Steuben thus spent several years of his infancy in Poland, in the Crimea and at Kronstadt on the Gulf of Finland. With the death of Frederick Wilhelm I on May 31, 1740, his son Frederick II was crowned King of Prussia.

When Emperor Charles VI died on October 20, 1740, he was succeeded by his daughter Maria Theresa, Archduchess of Austria and Queen of Bohemia and Hungary. Despite promises to support her accession, Frederick marched 40,000 Prussian troops into the Austrian Duchy of Silesia on December 1, 1740, under the pretext of protecting its inhabitants and providing "for the tranquillity of that duchy, which is equally necessary to us." He thus precipitated the major European powers into the War of the Austrian Succession (1740-1748). King Frederick entered the Silesian provincial capital of Breslau (now Wroclaw), situated on the River Oder, on January 3, 1741, to a friendly welcome from its inhabitants. An Imperial army of 16,000 Austrians, Croats, Serbs, Moravians and Bohemians, commanded by Field-Marshal Wilhelm Neipperg, marched in snowy weather and relieved the besieged fortress at Neisse on April 5, 1741. Frederick, in hurried pursuit, caught up with his antagonists five days later near the village of Mollwitz, where well-trained Prussian infantry, using a three-ranked firing line for the first time, won the day. On August 10, 1741, Prussian soldiers occupied Breslau. By the Convention of Klein-Schnellendorf, signed October 9, 1741, the defeated Hapsburgs conceded — for the time being, at least — the Prussian conquest of Silesia. On October 31, 1741, the Austrian garrison at Neisse surrendered to Prince Leopold of Anhalt-Dessau. Royal Prussian Engineer-Lieutenant Wilhelm Augustin von Steuben was cited for meritorious service during the bombardment and siege of Neisse. The Steuben family then took up residence in Breslau, where

Frederick Wilhelm von Steuben was schooled by Jesuits. King Frederick led an allied army of Prussian, Saxon and French troops into Moravia the following spring. After turning back the Austrians at Chotusitz, Frederick achieved a negotiated peace in June 1742.

In August 1744, after a brief interlude of peace, Frederick invaded the Austrian crownland of Bohemia, tramping his army across neutral Saxony and laying siege to Prague, the second largest city in the Hapsburg;s domain, forcing its surrender on September 16, 1744. At fourteen years of age, Steuben accompanied his father on the campaign. Confronted by a strong opponent and facing winter in hostile country, Frederick withdrew across the Elbe River with the Austrians in determined pursuit. In harsh winter cold and deep snow, suffering heavy losses to exposure, the Prussians straggled back across the mountains into Silesia, from whence they had come.

Frederick rebuilt his army for an anticipated assault by the Austrians come spring. After a night march, the Prussian army fell upon and routed the Austro-Saxon army at Hohenfriedberg (now Dabromierz), on June 4, 1745, ending their hope of regaining Silesia. Despite the advantage of tactical surprise, the Austrian army was again defeated at the town of Soor in northeastern Bohemia on September 30, 1745. The Austro-Saxon armies attempted to recoup their losses with a winter campaign into the heart of Prussian Brandenburg, but Frederick forestalled their intentions with a pincer movement against Saxon outposts and supply depots. A Prussian force, commanded by Hereditary Prince Leopold I (“Old Dessauer”), soundly defeated the Saxons at the battle of Kesseldorf, on the outskirts of the provincial capital of Dresden, on December 15th. After the capitulation of her Saxon allies, Empress Maria Theresa was forced to accept the cession of Silesia to Prussia by the Treaty of Dresden on December 25, 1745. She prepared for future retaliation by securing an alliance with Czarina Elizabeth of Russia in 1746. Completing an alliance with Bavaria in June 1746, the Austrians turned their attention to the French, eventually reversing their earlier losses in northern Italy.

In seizing Silesia, King Frederick had upset the balance of power in central Europe, thrusting Prussia forward as a dangerous competitor with the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Fully realizing that wars to sustain the balance of power in Europe would be wars of shifting alliances, King Frederick understood that he could be easily overwhelmed by the combination of powerful neighbors. Prussia’s survival would depend upon its military ability to settle the issue on one front, concentrating its resources against one opponent at a time and knocking them out of the fight quickly; this called for an offensive strategy. He therefore turned his attention to “building an integrated, front-loaded military system” capable of “winning immediate, decisive victories.” This required the development of

operational speed and maneuver. To this end, Frederick experimented with the linear system of engagement, but improved upon the processional method of deployment, allowing the two battalions of a regiment to form a line of battle in less than fifteen minutes.

By the time that sixteen-year-old Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben enlisted as a lance-corporal in 1746, he had already witnessed his father's several military campaigns. Schooled in mathematics and the practical sciences, Steuben no doubt endured the drudgery of peacetime service in planning and preparing fortifications. But war was not long in coming. A superficial truce was achieved by the Treaty of Aix-la-Chapelle in 1748, as the great competing European powers maneuvered for diplomatic advantage over their adversaries. Wenzel Anton Fürst von Kaunitz, Austrian State-Chancellor and ambassador to the French court from 1750 to 1753, achieved the diplomatic coup of his age by negotiating the alliance of France and Austria, hereditary adversaries. Frederick was his own worst enemy; the Treaty of Westminster, concluded in January 1756, bound Prussia and England to mutual assistance and military cooperation in the event of invasion, but it propelled the French into Kaunitz's embrace. France and Austria concluded a defensive alliance on May 1, 1756. Prussia was suddenly enveloped by powerful enemies, having only England (with the Continental interests of its Hanoverian king) as an ally.

Frederick the Great touched off the Seven Years' War by his invasion of Saxony on August 29, 1756. Virtually unopposed, his troops marched into the capital of Dresden on September 9. Maintaining the initiative, Frederick took his army into Bohemia on September 30. At Lobositz, Austrian Field-Marshal Maximilian von Browne skillfully challenged the Prussians, inflicting severe losses before withdrawing from the field. The Austrians, however, were unable to rescue the Saxons in their Camp at Pirna and on October 14, 1756, the Saxon army surrendered.

On January 10, 1757, the Imperial Diet declared war on Prussia. King Frederick again seized the initiative and invaded Bohemia, this time in force. The Austrian army, now commanded by Archduke Charles, withdrew to the provincial capital of Prague. Battle was joined on June 6 by armies of nearly equal size; the Austrians, however, holding the advantage of a prepared defensive position. Frederick decided upon a flanking maneuver that stalled in heavy fighting. An opening, however, was found in the enemy's line and Prussians poured through, throwing the Austrians into full retreat. The Austrians lost nearly 14,000 men killed, wounded or captured, but Frederick lost 11,740 killed or wounded. Steuben was twice wounded at the Battle of Prague. Frederick attempted to force the city's capitulation by heavy bombardment. When the Prussians were beaten back at

Kolin (now in the Czech Republic) on June 18, 1757, they abandoned the siege of Prague and withdrew into northern Bohemia.

Dark clouds were gathering on the eastern front as a Russian army marched towards East Prussia in May 1757. On August 30, Field-Marshal Hans von Lehwaldt surprised the numerically superior Russian column at Gross-Jägersdorf. Though defeated, the Prussians were able to stem the Russian advance and save the isolated Baltic province from being immediately overwhelmed.

To the northwest, William Augustus, Duke of Cumberland, attempting to blunt a French advance into Hanover, was narrowly defeated on July 25 at Hastenbeck. The French seized Hamburg and Bremen, pinning the British expeditionary force against the North Sea. Cumberland capitulated on September 8. Prince Ferdinand of Brunswick arrived to confront the French with little more than a token force. Surprisingly, the over-extended French commander, Duc de Richelieu, sated by the plunder of Hanover, asked for an armistice until spring. In the first weeks of September, Frederick led his army to the west on an unprecedented forced march — covering 170 miles — only to learn of Cumberland's surrender. Austrian Prince Joseph von Sachsen-Hildburghausen, commanding about 30,000 Imperial German troops on the upper Rhine, was reinforced by a French force of 24,000 men under Marshal Charles de Soubise. Together they advanced to meet the Prussians. Lieutenant-General Friedrich Wilhelm von Seydlitz, commanding the Prussian cavalry, opened the fray with a resounding charge that thundered down upon and routed advancing squadrons of Imperial horseman and infantry. French infantry now marched into a killing ground as Prussian infantry, artillery and cavalry, deployed in an obtuse angle, poured shot, canister and musket volleys into their ranks. Seydlitz's cavalry broke the ranks of Franconian and French infantry, sending them pell-mell in retreat.

Steuben became aide-de-camp to the famous dare-devil General Johan von Mayr, organizing eight companies of elite light-infantry skirmishers in Silesia, known as Mayr Free Battalion. Under command of General von Lestwitz, First Lieutenant Frederick von Steuben and his regiment were at the vanguard of the Prussian army during the battle of Rossbach on November 5, 1757. Though outnumbered at least two-to-one, the Prussians forced the rout of French and Imperial troops and inflicted heavy casualties: five thousand killed or wounded and another five thousand captured; the Prussians lost about 550 killed or wounded.

While Frederick met the enemy in the western theatre, the Austrians invaded Silesia and besieged Prussian strongholds: the fortress at Swednitz surrendered on November 13 and Breslau on November 25. King Frederick quickly led his army towards Breslau, encountering a superior enemy force at the village of Leuthen on December 4. The superbly trained Prussian infantry outmaneuvered and soundly

defeated their opponents, forcing them to abandon the province. The large Austrian garrison at Breslau surrendered on December 20.

The Russians overran East Prussia in January 1758. In May, Frederick attempted unsuccessfully to seize the Austrian fortress at Olmütz. At Zorndorf, on August 25, 1758, he surprised the Russian army. By ferocious assaults and the most desperate fighting, the Prussians overcame the invaders and forced their withdrawal. Frederick returned to Saxony. On October 14, 1758, a vastly superior Austrian army defeated the Prussians at Hochkirch.

The Russians invaded Brandenburg in July 1759. King Frederick tried to prevent their conjunction with the Austrians, confronting the invaders under a scorching sun at Kunersdorf, (now Kunowice, on the River Oder) on August 12, 1759. After a heavy and deadly effective artillery barrage, Prussian and Silesian infantry stormed a hilltop Russian position. But then they pushed forward on a narrow front against the strongest concentration of the combined Russian and Austrian army. In furious but futile assaults, the Prussians, short of ammunition, exhausted by the heat and severely depleted by casualties, broke and ran. Both sides suffered about 19,000 casualties. Steuben was again wounded at Kunersdorf. Although the Austrians captured Dresden, they and their Russian allies failed to take advantage of their victory. The Prussians spent a bitter winter on starvation rations.

Upon Mayr's death, Steuben became adjutant to Lieutenant-General Johann von Hülsen, a division commander under the King's brother, Prince Henry. Stalemate prevailed on every front in the spring and summer of 1760, but the Austrians captured a small screening force in Silesia and set out to reconquer the province, stronghold by stronghold, capturing Glatz, Liegnitz and Parchwitz. A Russian army, some 60,000 strong, marched toward Silesia to complete its conquest. Prince Henry now marched his army westward to join the battle for Silesia. Steuben was engaged in the battle of Liegnitz (in Silesia) on August 15, 1760, where Frederick's troops, exhausted and outnumbered, defeated a poorly led Austrian army and was thus able to prevent the union of the Russian and Austrian armies. On October 9, 1760, a combined force of Russian and Austrian light cavalry and grenadiers captured Berlin and looted Frederick's palace at Charlottenburg. Frederick responded by marching his army towards Saxony, engaging the enemy at Torgau on the Elbe River. A frontal assault by Prussian grenadiers withered under heavy artillery fire, though the second wave crested the Austrian positions before being repulsed. Lieutenant-General Johann von Hülsen rallied remnants of the earlier assault troops succeeded in forcing the Austrian's withdrawal. The final cost of the victory, however, was frightful: 17,000 Prussian soldiers were killed, wounded or missing.

The Russian and Austrian armies joined forces in August 1761, and Frederick led

his army, now outnumbered better than two-to-one, onto good defensive ground near the fortress of Schweidnitz, where his engineers prepared field fortifications. Unable or unwilling to coordinate an assault upon the Prussian defenses, the allies departed on September 9. Shortly after Frederick marched his army towards winter quarters at Niesse, the Austrians captured Schweidnitz with its great horde of munitions and supplies.

In 1761, Lieutenant von Steuben was transferred to the general staff of General Knoblauch (Knobloch). As Knoblauch's adjutant, his brigade formed part of Lieutenant-General Count Platen's corps who, in 1761, when the Russians besieged the Baltic port of Kolberg in September 1761, Frederick ordered Count Platen's corps of 10,000 light infantry and cavalry to raid the Russian supply depot at Posen. They succeeded in destroying a Russian train of ammunition and provisions, routing 4,000 Russian troops and marching another 1,900 prisoners to Landsberg on the Warthe. Steuben's father, by now a major of engineers at Küstrin, erected the bridge across the Warthe which enabled Count Platen to cross. Making a deep penetration into enemy territory, Platen's corps was surrounded by a superior Russian force at Treptow, late in 1761, and surrendered. Steuben reportedly negotiated the articles of capitulation which allowed men in ranks to retain their equipment of rations and clothing and officers their swords. The port of Kolberg capitulated on December 16, 1761, completing the Russian subjugation of East Pomerania. Captain Steuben was among fifty-eight Prussian officers taken as prisoners of war to St. Petersburg. Czar Peter III, who ascended the Russian throne upon the death of Frederick's implacable foe, Czarina Elizabeth, on January 6, 1762, used Steuben as an envoy to King Frederick. The new Czar, an ardent admirer of Frederick the Great, immediately concluded an armistice with Prussia in July 1762, restoring all captured territory. Peter III was deposed on July 18, but the Russians were effectively out of the war.

Brigademajor Steuben returned to serve as staff captain and aide-de-camp to Frederick the Great and as military attaché with the Prussian embassy to the star-crossed Czar Peter III. Steuben was one of thirteen staff officers personally selected for special training in military science by King Frederick the Great (who was considered the greatest military genius of his age). Steuben was employed as deputy-quartermaster to his old regiment under Von Lestwitz. In this capacity, he personally served in the King's retinue during the siege of Schweidnitz, twenty-eight miles southwest of Breslau in Silesia, whose surrender on October 9, 1762, proved a decisive Prussian victory. The Austrians suffered another defeat at Frieberg in Saxony on October 29, this time at the hands of Prince Henry. Peace negotiations opened on December 30, 1762. On February 15, 1763, the Treaty of Hubertusburg ended the Seven Years' War. Captain Steuben was granted a canonry in Havelberg Cathedral, paying an annual stipend of 1,200 German

florins.

With the Peace of Hubertsburg, Captain von Steuben was discharged from the staff of General Friedrich Wilhelm von Gaudy, commander of the regiment of Salmuth, in the general demobilization of 1763. His career apparently scuttled by the dislike of General Anhalt, Steuben later said that: "I have nothing to be ashamed of for my part in the war, though it may be that an inconsiderate step and perhaps an unreconcilable enemy destroyed the expectation of a better reward." Through noble patronage of Prince Henry and others, he found employment as chamberlain or Grand Marshall in the household bodyguard of the bankrupt Catholic prince of Hohenzollern-Hechingen, a small principality of southern Germany, lying northwest of the Danube River, on the borders of Baden and Württemberg, paying a salary of 1,200 German florins. He also was commissioned a Colonel of the Swabian Circle, making him, in a sense, honorary commander of the local militia. Most portraits of Baron von Steuben show him proudly wearing "a splendid medal of gold and diamonds.?" This impressive ornament was a Star of the Order of Fidelity, the outward sign of an honorary knighthood conferred upon Hofmarschall von Steuben by William, Margrave of Baden-Durlach, in 1769.

Hoping to improve his station in life and relieve his many debts, Steuben explored various prospects for securing a lucrative government appointment or, failing that, a remunerative marriage. He journeyed to Paris seeking a French military commission and met with the new French War Minister, Count de St. Germain. The French government was then engaged (more or less discreetly) in supplying military assistance to American revolutionaries, but many supplies had been squandered in America by a lack of order and discipline among the ill-trained rebels. Sending French military advisors to America would have constituted an open breach of neutrality and St. Germain immediately recognized the potential value of a former Prussian staff-officer to his cause. Appropriately, he forwarded his visitor to the American ministers in France, Benjamin Franklin and Silas Deane; here he also became acquainted with Peter S. Du Ponceau, only seventeen years of age, who spoke English fluently and who served as interpreter. Their negotiations, however, soon dead-ended: having no ideological predisposition toward republican uprisings, Steuben was initially disgusted by a congressional prohibition on ministerial guarantees of either high rank, financial rewards or even travel expenses to foreign adventurers. He departed Paris for Rastadt on July 25th. Most timely for the American cause, Steuben's last hope for advantageous employment by another German principality proved unavailing, and the Baron returned to Paris and entered into the confidence of the American ministers. They neatly conspired to inflate his resume by conferring the rank of "Lieutenant-general" in the Prussian army upon him. The French minister loaned him money

enough to outfit himself properly for his "rank" and to meet his travel expenses. Casting for his fortune, Baron von Steuben, Knight of the Order of Fidelity, boarded a French supply-ship under an assumed name and departed for the New World. Facing storms, mutiny and fire aboard his gunpowder-laden transport, the freshly minted "Lieutenant-general," his private secretary, Peter Du Ponceau, and three French adjutants, braved a two-month ocean voyage from Merseilles and gratefully disembarked at Portsmouth, New Hampshire, on December 1, 1777. Their first communication ashore was news of Burgyne's defeat at Saratoga.

Steuben proceeded to Boston to present his letters of introduction and recommendation to Congressman John Hancock. Here he met Samuel and John Adams. On January 9, 1778, General Washington replied to Steuben, asking him to proceed to York, Pennsylvania, where he might present his credentials to Congress and receive their decision upon his offer of service. His Boston host, John Hancock, outfitted him with a sleigh and horses for the arduous overland journey to Pennsylvania.

In February 1778, he was interviewed by a Congressional committee of five members, chaired by Dr. Witherspoon. In more private interviews with key politicians, however, Steuben believed that Congress employed him with the promise of ample indemnification in the event that his services proved instrumental to American victory. Congress favorably received the committee's report and ordered Steuben to join the army at their winter cantonment.



Steuben's Offer of Service to Congress
Portsmouth, December 6, 1777.

Honorable Gentlemen:

The honor of serving a respectable Nation, engaged in the noble enterprise of defending its rights and Liberty, is the only motive that brought me over to this Continent. I ask neither riches nor titles. I am come here from the remotest end of Germany at my own expense, and have given up an honorable and lucrative rank; I have made no condition with your Deputies in France, nor shall I make any with you. My only ambition is to serve you as a Volunteer, to deserve the confidence of your General in Chief, and to follow him in all his operations, as I have done during seven campaigns with the King of Prussia. Two and a twenty years past at such a school seem to give me a right of thinking myself in the number of

experienced Officers; and if I am Possessor of some talents in the Art of War, they should be much dearer to me, if I could employ them in the service of a Republick, such as I hope soon to see America. I should willingly purchase at my whole Blood's Experience the honor of seeing one Day my Name after those of the defenders of your Liberty. Your gracious acceptance will be sufficient for me, and I ask no other favour than to be received among your Officers. I dare hope you will agree to my Request, that you will be so good as to send me your Order to Boston, where I shall expect them and accordingly take convenient Measures. I have the honor to be, with respect, honorable Gentlemen
Your most obedient and very humble servant
Steuben.

Congress Replies.

January 14, 1778

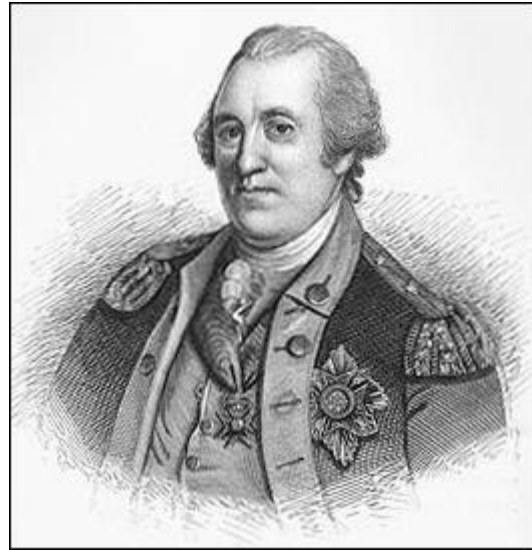
Whereas the Baron Steuben, a lieutenant general in foreign service, has, in a most disinterested and heroic manner, offered his services to these States in the quality of a volunteer.

Resolved, that the President present the thanks of Congress in behalf of these United States, to the Baron Steuben, for the zeal he has shown for the cause of America, and the disinterested tender he has been pleased to make of his military talents; and inform him, that Congress cheerfully accept of his service as a volunteer in the army of these states, and wish him to repair to General Washington's quarters as soon as convenient.

On February 23, 1778, the tattered Continentals at Valley forge were treated to the wintry specter of a stocky fur-robed Prussian Baron seated in a sleigh, petting his Italian greyhound named Azor, while dragging a splendid entourage of Negro grooms and drivers, Boston servants, a French cook, French aides and a military secretary in his wake. Typically, the Baron had staged his grand entrance with borrowed sums.

Washington was painfully aware of the shortcomings of his make-shift army, but his recent prescription for an inspector-generalship had been rendered impalpable by political and military intrigues. Impressed by the Baron's military credentials but sensitive to the xenophobic jealousies of his staff, Washington assigned his distinguished volunteer to the post of acting Inspector-General.

The professional Prussian trooper was supposedly appalled and nearly discouraged by the sight of naked troops bearing rusty muskets. He shuddered at the pervasive indifference to proper military conduct and simple sanitary precautions. Yet, the Prussian army had spent the frigid winter of 1759 under similar circumstances.



His arrival on the scene was truly a god-send: for it was then widely believed that the American army lacked the "order and subordination" necessary to counter the "superior discipline of Howe's army." The victory at Saratoga, however, had brought an alliance with France, concluded February 6, 1778. On March 17, 1778, General Steuben set out to reform the army by personally training 100 soldiers as a model company. He habitually began instructions before dawn, drilling his select troops twice daily. The sight of an officer of rank and title performing the routine of a drill-sergeant was curiously regarded by his shabby audience and his antics soon became the best show in town. Unable to speak English, Steuben wielded a musket and pantomimed the manual of arms. He soon memorized basic commands in English and barked them phonetically to his trainees. Such awkward methods and the clumsy response of his pupils produced such frustration that Steuben invented legendary curses in a curious hybrid of languages.

Whatever the head winds, Steuben's progress in establishing a uniform system of maneuvers and discipline proved nothing short of miraculous. Once trained, members of Steuben's select Guard in turn schooled other troops in basic military procedures. In a sense, they became graduates of the first American military academy. In a few short weeks, his drills were being practiced by large units of the army. In testimony to his accomplishments, Washington recommended Baron Steuben as Inspector-general with the rank of major-general on April 30th. He accordingly received his commission on May 5, 1778.



Baron Steuben established the company (actually a battalion) as the tactical unit. Battalions collected to form a thousand-man brigade; two brigades made a division. He also inaugurated a system of administration, establishing a Department of Inspection with two ranks of inspectors: brigade inspectors chosen by field-officers from their own ranks; and, above them, five sub-inspectors with the rank of lieutenant-colonel to superintend the exercise and discipline of the troops and to assist in the execution of field manuevers, especially in battle. Steuben insisted upon monthly inspections of all supplies and ammunition. His inspectors noted the number and condition of the men and the state of their arms and accoutrements, reporting any loss or damage in standardized returns. Thus Steuben instituted such routine paperwork as was necessary to pinpoint accountability for both men and materials. William North recalled one occasion when Baron Steuben, setting the example for his inspectors, spent seven hours with one brigade, composed of three regiments, investigating the excuses for every absebee, examining with close attention the contents of every cartridge box and knapsack, and the condition of every musket. According to an inspection return of the army submitted to Richard Peters, of the War Department, so thoroughly had Steuben's reforms corrected waste and misapplication of military supplies that "only three muskets were deficient, and those accounted for." Congress later noted that his reforms "in the department of inspector general, have been the principal cause of introducing and perfecting discipline in our army, and of establishing such a system of economy as produced an extraordinary reduction of expenses".

In training and organizing the Continental troops, Baron von Steuben tailored European military standards to fit his ill-clothed civilian-troopers. John Laurens, a son of the President of Congress then serving on Washington's staff, recognized Steuben's genius as "a man profound in the science of war" who was willing and

able to adapt "established forms to stubborn circumstances." General von Steuben enhanced the potency of American firepower by simplifying the standard procedure for loading, aiming and shooting musketry. With clockwork precision, succeeding ranks of soldiers could issue a savage and recurrent venom of lead. Furthermore, the army was taught to march and maneuver punctually in orderly masses rather than in cumbersome single-file lines. This promoted the rapid deployment of troops in battle and the development of more effective and reflexive strategies. Since eighteenth century warfare was conducted much like a panoramic human chess-game, these organizational skills were indispensable in gaining the advantage over an opponent.

While at Valley Forge, General Steuben formed a life-long friendship with Captain Benjamin Walker. Born in England, Walker had been trained as an accountant. While a Captain in the Second New York Regiment, he stepped forward on the drill-ground and rescued the Baron in a moment of supreme frustration by offering his services as interpreter, being fluent in French and English. He thus became Steuben's trusted aide-de-camp. Having an excellent command of French, Benjamin Walker conversed easily with his Prussian superior and managed his correspondence. He served for a time on Washington's staff. After the war, he settled as a broker in New York City and regularly attended to the Baron's affairs. He died on January 13, 1818.



Steuben recognized the enormity of his task in turning awkward recruits into steady soldiers and organizing the distribution of armaments and supplies. He resigned himself to a gradual success, building confidence and reforming attitudes as well as skills:

"We have not time to do all. The business is, to give to our troops a relish for their trade, to make them feel a confidence in their own skill. Your officers, following the miserable British sergeant system, would think themselves degraded by an attention to tyhe drill. But the time will come, when there will be a better mode of thinking. Then we will atend to turning out the toes."

The transformation of the Continental troops under Steuben's supervision was immediately evident as they marched out of their winter cantonment in pursuit of General Howe's army. Receiving word of the French alliance and the imminent arrival of a French fleet off the American coast, the British army vacuated

Philadelphia and retreated across New Jersey toward New York. In the now famous confrontation with the British rear-guard at Monmouth Courthouse, General Charles Lee confused his attacking forces, precipitating a retreat. His report to Washington of the unaccountable confusion and retreat of the American troops under Lee's command provoked a rude reply from General Lee, for which he later apologized. Steuben rallied the broken left flank of the American army, reformed it while under a cannonade and then marched it calmly back into combat. Colonel Alexander Hamilton spoke for many in the army when he said "he had never known nor conceived the value of military discipline until that day." When the main army marched northward from New Brunswick, while most brigadier-generals were occupied by the court-martial trial of General Lee, Washington temporarily appointed Steuben to conduct one wing of the army to the Hudson River. Recognizing jealousies from native officers, General Washington declined to support Baron Steuben's request for transfer to the line, but upheld his supremacy as inspector-general to the Continental army against rivals.

Prescribing a rudimentary education in the martial arts of his time, Steuben composed a manual of military regulations (best known as the Blue Book) which soon became the "bible" of the United States Army. Steuben wrote this work in French and had it translated into English by his secretary, Pierre Etienne Duponceau, with the assistance of his loyal aide-de-camp, Captain Benjamin Walker. Alexander Hamilton edited the text while Captain Pierre Charles L'Enfant (who later achieved fame as architect of the National Capital) provided illustrations. Steuben's "Regulations for the Order and Discipline of the Troops of the United States" was endorsed by Congress on March 29, 1779 and was soon adopted as a training guide by most state militias. Steuben's handbook also imposed a system of regular monthly inspections and instruction, orderly and sanitary encampments and specific job-descriptions. Amidst all of his formulae regulating military life in even its smallest habits, Steuben recognized that officers had to command and not simply demand the respect and obedience of their troops. The Blue Book's "Instructions for the Captain" listed his military Beatitudes:



A Captain cannot be too careful of the company the state has committed to his charge. He must pay the greatest attention to the health of his men, their discipline, arms, accouterments, ammunition, clothes and necessaries. His first object should be, to gain the love of his men, by treating them with every possible

kindness and humanity, inquiring into their complaints, and when well founded, seeing them redressed. He should know every man of his company by name and character. He should often visit those who are sick, speak tenderly to them, see that the public provision, whether of medicine or diet, is duly administered, and procure them besides such comforts and conveniences as are in his power. The attachment that arises from this kind of attention to the sick and wounded, is almost inconceivable; it will moreover be the means of preserving the lives of many valuable men.

In April of 1779, while the army was encamped at Middlebrook, General Steuben acquired a new aide-de-camp, Captain William North (1752-1836). He was a volunteer in 1775, under General Benedict Arnold, in the expedition from Kennebec into Canada. He later commanded a company in Colonel Jackson's regiment, fought in the battle of Monmouth, and then became an aide-de-camp, life-long friend and advisor to Baron Steuben. After the war, North succeeded Steuben as Inspector-general. He later served as a New York legislator, Speaker of the New York Assembly and as United States Senator from New York under the new Federal Constitution.

Steuben's desire for a field command was resisted by Washington who knew of the resentment of his officers toward the high placement of foreign soldiers of fortune. While the Continentals spent their bitter winter at Morristown, Major-general von Steuben acted as Washington's representative to Congress in a review of military policies affecting the recruitment, organization and administration of a national army. He was finally given command of Continental troops and New Jersey militiamen in the field when 6000 British and Hessian soldiers under the command of General Wilhelm von Knyphausen threatened military stores at Morristown in June of 1780. But the stubborn valor of the New Jersey Brigade assisted by their armed countrymen slowed the enemy's advance. Costly skirmishes at Connecticut Farms, the Rahway Bridge, Springfield and Elizabethtown forced a British withdrawal to Staten Island. Fearing that British operations in New Jersey were a diversion, Washington ordered General Steuben to immediately inspect, reform and strengthen his strategic post at West Point. In the waning embers of the summer of 1780, Steuben made a division commander as Washington advanced his army into Bergen County. During this campaign, Steuben supervised the construction of a blockhouse at Sneden's Landing and sat on the court-martial of Benedict Arnold's unfortunate agent, Major John Andre.

On October 23, 1780, General Steuben was sent to Virginia by Washington to assist General Greene in building a credible Southern army. In a state of emergency, he received virtual control of the State troops in Virginia but was undone by the poor showing and unreliability of the local militias that composed

the main body of his command. Having rescued military stores under his protection at Point of Forks from British raiders, he was widely criticized for a tactical retreat in the face of superior enemy forces. The vexed Inspector-general cursed his unreliable self-defense forces and state officials in Virginia saying that this was a place where "every farmer is a general, but where nobody wishes to be a soldier." He concluded his war service as a division commander in the siege-trenches surrounding the British at Yorktown where the final victory was earned. It was he who ordered the American flag to be flown above the surrendered British works at Yorktown on October 19, 1781.

Serving as a soldier of fortune, Baron von Steuben hoped to be honorably recompensed for his invaluable services. The sorry state of his personal finances became evident when he had to sell his favorite horse and a set of silver tableware in order to entertain the Allied commanders after their success at Yorktown. Washington made the impoverished Baron a small loan and Steuben departed northward on horseback, his purse nearly empty.

As negotiations in Europe dragged on toward a final settlement of the war, Steuben was occupied by military matters anticipating the withdrawal of British troops. Accepting Washington's recommendation, Congress sent its Inspector-general on a futile mission to receive possession of British posts on the Canadian frontier in July of 1783. During these long months of watchful waiting, Baron Steuben laid plans for his return to Europe; but the French ministry greeted his requests for compensation and for the award of a high military post with polite indifference. American independence was formally recognized by the Treaty of Paris on September 3, 1783. The British army evacuated Manhattan in November. General Baron von Steuben attended Washington's farewell party at Fraunces Tavern on December 4, 1783, and then accompanied the Commander on his journey to Philadelphia for the final settlement of his accounts with Congress. Shortly thereafter, Steuben leased a farmstead on Manhattan known as the "Louvre" which occupied the ground now taken by New York Hospital-Cornell University.

General Washington's Farewell Token of Sincere Friendship

Annapolis, December 23, 1783

My Dear Baron: Although I have taken frequent opportunities, both in public and private, of acknowledging your zeal, attention and abilities in performing the duties of your office, yet I wish to make use of this last moment of my public life to signify in the strongest terms my entire approbation of your conduct, and to express my sense of the obligations the public is under to you for your faithful and meritorious service.

I beg you will be convinced, my dear Sir, that I should rejoice if it could ever be in my power to serve you more essentially than by expressions of regard and affection. But in the meantime I am persuaded you will not be displeased with this farewell token of my sincere friendship and esteem for you.

This is the last letter I shall ever write while I continue in the service of my country. The hour of my resignation is fixed at twelve this day, after which I shall become a private citizen on the banks of the Potomac, where I shall be glad to embrace you, and testify the great esteem and consideration, with which I am, my dear Baron, your most obedient and affectionate servant.

George Washington

Discouraged in his hopes of returning to a profitable station in Europe, Major-general von Steuben informed the NJ legislature that he was "anxiously desirous to become a citizen of the State of New Jersey." In recognition of his "many and signal services to the United States of America," state legislators responded on December 23, 1783, by presenting him with the use and emoluments of the confiscated estate of Jan Zabriskie at New-Bridge, provided that the Baron would "hold, occupy and enjoy the said estate in person, and not by tenant."

Accordingly, Governor Philemon Dickinson informed the Baron of this legislative gift and related his knowledge of the estate based upon recent inquiries: "there are on the premises an exceeding good House, an excellent barn, together with many useful outbuildings, all of which I am told, want some repairs...there is ..a Grist-mill; a good Orchard, some meadow Ground, & plenty of Wood. The distance from N York by land 15 miles, but you may keep a boat & go from your own door to N York by water — Oysters, Fish & wild fowl in abundance — Possession will be given to you in the Spring, when you will take a view of the premises."

The Governor regretted that the legislature had only vested Steuben with life-rights and not outright title to the property, saying: "This not, my dear Baron, equal either to my wishes & your mind, but tis the best I could probably obtain — You'll observe by the Act, that you are to possess it, but not tenant it out, I am ashamed of this clause but it could not be avoided — This may easily be obviated, by keeping a bed & Servants there & visiting the premises now & then — but I flatter myself, from the representation which has been made to me, that it will be your permanent residence; its vicinity to N York, must render it agreeable to you."

Under these terms, it is likely that the Prussian Inspector-general contemplate taking up residence at New-Bridge. His biographer, Friedrich Kapp (writing in 1859) says only that "Steuben, when informed that Zabriskie, in consequence of that confiscation, was left without means, did not accept the gift, and interposed in behalf of Zabriskie." Unfortunately, the documented facts do not square with this kindly interpretation. For on January 24, 1784, a claim for compensation from the

British government was filed by John J. Zabriskie, "now a refugee in the City of New York" for his former homestead at New-Bridge which "is now possessed under this Confiscation Law." He described his estate as: "One large Mansion House, seventy feet long and forty feet wide, containing twelve rooms built with stone, with Outhouses consisting of a bake House, Smoke House, Coach House, and two large Barns, and a Garden, situated at a place called New Bridge (value 850 Pounds); also One large gristmill containing two pair of stones adjoining said Mansion House (1200 Pounds); Forty Acres of Land adjoining said Mansion House consisting of Meadow Land and two orchards."

Zabriskie's 1784-account clearly describes the well-known sandstone mansion which yet stands at this location. Whatever the conflicting sentiments of the Revolutionary general and dispossessed Loyalist may have been, one fact was equally evident to both: The Zabriskie mansion was not some sleepy country-estate that needed only the fires stoked and the slip-covers lifted to make it cozy. It had served repeatedly as a fort, military headquarters, an intelligence-gathering post, an encampment-ground and the scene of numerous skirmishes. Undoubtedly the abuses of war had rendered the dwelling-house uninhabitable, stripped of its furnishings. The old and impecunious Saxon soldier was hardly able to restore its former grandeur. Besides, the legislature had not given him title to the property, but only a right to life-tenancy. It would hardly have been worthwhile for him to invest any large sum in the renovation of a property which he did not own.

To comprehend Baron Steuben's predicament we must appreciate that the conduct of the war had left the national Confederation virtually bankrupt. Unable to directly levy taxes, it depended upon the voluntary support of the States to meet its obligations. Its paper currency was considered as plentiful and as worthless as "oak leaves." As early as July 4, 1779, General von Steuben had written to a friend in Hohenzollern that Congress had promised him "estates in the best parts of Jersey and Pennsylvania." The various States were better able to compensate Revolutionary veterans by awards of confiscated Loyalist estates or of vast tracts of unsurveyed lands in the unsettled interior of the country. During the war, Virginia granted 15,000 acres in the present State of Ohio to General Steuben and Pennsylvania granted him 2000 acres lying west of the Allegheny mountains. While the Baron thus became a considerable landowner, he was in effect "land-poor" as these properties lay in an inaccessible and unsettled wilderness.

During the spring of 1784, General Steuben took temporary lodgings in Philadelphia where he performed his final duties as Inspector-general. On March 24, 1784, Steuben submitted his resignation to Congress. According to his biographers, a Congressional audit made in the winter of 1781-82 showed that Major-general Baron von Steuben was owed \$8,500 for services rendered; he

received only \$1,700 and a 6-per cent Treasury certificate for \$6,800. Steuben was later unsuccessful in selling this treasury note for 10 cents on the dollar. Congress accepted his resignation on April 15, 1784, and decided to present him with a gold hilted sword.

Congress Accepts Steuben's Resignation

“Resolved, that the thanks of the United States, in Congress assembled, be given to Baron Steuben for the great zeal and abilities he has discovered in the discharge of his office; that a gold-hilted sword be presented to him as a mark of the high sense Congress entertain of his character and services, and that the superintendent of finance take order for procuring the same.”

Congress then moved to present the Baron with \$10,000. The motion was defeated but the Inspector-general was most generously allowed him to draw from arrears in pay and expenses that were owed him. Steuben expended part of this income on the renovation of the "Louvre" which he occupied in May of 1784 and further sums were apparently invested in the purchase and rehabilitation of his New-Bridge estate as is evidenced by his own correspondence. We can only explain this behavior by suggesting that Steuben still contemplated his removal to the Dutch-speaking environs of Hackensack. He rented the house in Jones's Woods - in the vicinity of present-day Fifty-seventh Street - from "ready-money Provost, who built it and named it "the Louvre."

Before investing in his estate at New-Bridge, General Steuben first intended to acquire title to the property in fee simple. On December 24, 1784, the New Jersey legislature responded to his overtures by passing a supplement to its previous act (which had awarded use of the Zabriskie estate to General Steuben) by authorizing the agent for forfeited estates to sell the property to the highest bidder and deposit the money in the State treasury. Interest upon the sum was to be paid to the Baron during his lifetime. Accordingly, the Zabriskie estate at New-Bridge was sold on April 1, 1785, but its purchaser was none other than the Baron himself acting through his agent, Captain Benjamin Walker. The purchase price was £1,500. The General's personal interest and familiarity with his Jersey estate was outlined in a letter addressed from New York to Governor Livingston on November 13, 1785:

Sir, — Having become the purchaser of that part of the estate of John Zabriskie, lying at the New-Bridge, near Hackensack, and the term of payment being arrived, an order from the commissioners of the continental treasury on the treasury of New Jersey lies ready for the agent whenever he shall please to call for it.

Before I take the deeds for this place, I have to request the favor of your Excellency to represent to the legislature, that the only lot of wood belonging to the place was withheld by the agent at the sale on a doubt of its being included in

the law because it is at the distance of three quarters of a mile from the house, and therefore could not, he supposed, be considered as “lying at the New-Bridge,” though on enquiry I find it was an appendage to the estate, and indeed is the only part of it on which there is a stick of wood; and it was bequeathed to J. Zabriskie by his father along with the house and mill; the lot consists of about 13 acres, it was left unsold with the house and mill, though every other part of J. Zabriskie’s estate was sold some years since, and being now unpossessed, great part of the wood is cut off, and the destruction daily increases. If the legislature meant to include it in the law, I must request that directions may be given to the agent to include it in the deed. If otherwise, as it is essential to the other part of the estate, I have to request that I may be permitted to purchase it at such valuation as may be thought just.

Your Excellency will, I flatter myself, excuse the liberty I take in requesting you to represent this matter to the legislature, and to obtain their decision on it so soon as the business before them will permit.

I have the honor to be, with great respect, sir, your Excellency’s most obed’t humble servant,

STEUBEN

His Excellency, Governor Livingston.

Between 1783 and 1785, General Steuben withdrew \$26,000 from the national treasury including the sum that he used to purchase the former Zabriskie homestead at public vendue. He apparently spent considerable money to renovate both his leased farmhouse on Manhattan as well as his prized Jersey estate. But his improvident lifestyle and poor management of personal finances outstripped his income and daily increased the number of his creditors. On February 28, 1786, a further act was passed by the NJ legislature which provided that, if payments on the property were not met by the following March (1787), then the Baron should have the use and benefit of the estate even though he resided in another state. Thus it wasn’t until 1789 — three years after the initial presentation of the property to Steuben — that the legislature abandoned its stipulation that he occupy or personally use the property in order to receive its profits. With this encouragement, Steuben apparently leased at least the mansion and mill back to Jan Zabriskie and so enjoyed the rental fees. There is evidence to suggest that Captain Walker (as Steuben’s business agent) and perhaps the Baron himself, occupied rooms in the house while managing the domestic renovation and commercial renaissance of this valuable site. Arndt Von Steuben claimed that Steuben spent winters in New York, but retired to his country home in summer. Receipts from New-Bridge Landing have survived issued under the style of the partnership of Walker & Zabriskie. There is also at least one letter (circa 1788) addressed by Senator William North to Benjamin Walker at Hackensack. On July

4th, 1786, Jan Zabriskie hosted General Steuben and his entourage at New Bridge. Unawares, the Baron paid for his own entertainment as Mr. Zabriskie's servants charged refreshments obtained from the New Bridge Inn to the General's account. But by 1786, Steuben's sights turned northward to a grant of 16,000 acres in Oneida County, New York, which he received from the legislature of that state on June 27, 1786.

By 1787, Steuben's finances were at low ebb. Bankrupt, he placed his affairs under the administration of Ben Walker. In 1788, he moved into rooms in the house of his friends, Benjamin and Polly Walker, on King Street. In May 1788, he set out for his vast estate in the Mohawk country. To pay off his debts and to gain some much needed capital, Baron Steuben wrote to Captain Walker on May 23, 1788, giving him full authority to sell his Jersey estate at New-Bridge. At about this time, his close friend and advisor William North confided: "The Jersey Estate must be sold and the proceeds sacredly appropriated to paying his debts and with the remainder he must live a recluse till the new Government [then forming under the Constitution] decides his affairs..."

Accordingly, on September 5, 1788, the New Jersey legislature repealed its previous acts and invested Baron von Steuben with full title to the former Zabriskie estate. Recognizing his predicament and hoping to save himself from further financial embarrassment, Steuben wrote to North in October of 1788, saying: "The jersey Estate must and is to be sold. Walker is my administrator, all debts are to be paid out of it." On November 6, 1788, Steuben again wrote to William North at his new home in Duanesburg, noting that "My jersey Estate is Advertised but not yet Sold, from this Walker Shall immediately pay to you the money, you so generously lend me and all my debts in New-York will be payed. I support my present poverty with more heroism than I Expected. All Clubs and parties are renounced, I seldom leave the House."

Steuben advertised his Jersey estate for sale in the New Jersey Journal on December 3, 1788, describing it as being "...long-noted as the best stand for trade in the state of New Jersey. Large well-built stone house, thoroughly rebuilt lately, a gristmill with two run of stone; excellent new kiln for drying grain for export built lately; other outbuildings, and 40 acres of land, one-half of which is excellent meadow. Situated on the bank of the river by which produce can be conveyed to New York in a few hours, and sloops of 40 tons burthern may load and discharge along side of the mill."

This remarkable statement shows that General Steuben and his agent, Benjamin Walker, made a considerable investment in his New-Bridge estate, reviving and modernizing its commercial operations and rehabilitating the mansion-house. The very day after this advertisement appeared, Jan Zabriskie (1767-1793), the son

and namesake of the Loyalist who had lost the property, purchased the old family homestead. Steuben happily reported in a letter dated December 12th: "My Jersey Estate is sold for twelve honored Pounds N. Y. Monney [about \$3,000]. Walker and Hammilton are my Administrators."

Steuben had hoped that the proceeds from the sale would more than satisfy his creditors and thus stave off the threatened forced sale of his Oneida tract. His hopes for a fresh start in the Mohawk valley were frustrated by the inaccessibility of the vast undeveloped estate and his perennial lack of capital and credit. Contrary to his original expectations, the New York grant was isolated from the Mohawk River by several perilous waterfalls on one of its tributaries and transport of products of the land by water was virtually impossible. On June 4, 1790, Congress finally granted him an annual pension of \$2,500 but declined to award him an additional \$10,000 bonus. Thus, we can say that the proceeds from the sale of his property at New-Bridge were the most valuable compensation for his war service to the Nation. In 1794, the Baron von Steuben died in poverty while resident in a crude log-house erected in the midst of an untamed wilderness. He was buried without ceremony in a plain pine coffin, wrapped in his military cloak and attended by his old aide-de-camp, Ben Walker.

John W. Mulligan to Benjamin Walker

Steuben, 29 November 1794

I am at length sufficiently composed to begin, o my dear Sir, a sad tale. On Tuesday morning last our friend, my father was struck with a palsy which deprived his left side of motion. The evening before we parted at eleven; he was well, perfectly well, at 4 o'clock. I was alarmed with the cry that he was dying, and when I entered his chamber he was in extreme agony and appeared to have suffered long. I sent for immediate assistance and dispatched White for Major North. He was sensible and could speak, reached violently, asked for an emetic which I gave him, it operated well. I then put him to bed from which I had taken him by his desire. He continued to speak at intervals till about six and from thence was speechless. He remained apparently sensible during the greater part of Tuesday, notwithstanding he was often in convulsions. That night he was pretty quiet though the fits sometimes returned. He did not show any sign of sense afterwards. every measure which the situation afforded was pursued to relieve him until the arrival of the doctor on Thursday. He administered medicines which gave some relief, but it was not long. The stroke was too violent and yesterday at 1/2 past 12 o'clock, oh, my good God, my parent died.

There was no stone to mark his grave. He named his dear friends and long-suffering advisors, Ben Walker and William North, as his heirs. Years later, when local townsmen were about to lay out a road virtually atop his resting-place, Ben

Walker had his remains removed to a safe distance and then placed a simple marker in his honor.

By the estimates of his contemporaries (both friend and foe), Major-general Frederick Baron von Steuben was a pleasant and able soldier, obliging and efficient in the performance of his duties. He achieved success by proving loyal, inventive and steadfast in the most discouraging circumstances. In so doing, he inspired remarkable confidence and devotion among his friends and comrades. An unreformed spendthrift, he was notoriously careless in the management of his personal finances and in the choice and entertainment of casual acquaintances. While justly memorialized for the economies and efficiency he effected as Inspector-general of the army; in the conduct of his private life, he proved a poor judge of business opportunities and was much given to grand and worthless speculations. Ambitious in pursuit of fame and fortune, he was known to possess a warm temper. If tempestuous at times, he was also quick to apologize for any mistake in judgment which his anger occasioned. Ever sociable, he loved his beef and sauerkraut but hated to dine alone. He was admired as a fine dresser, an accomplished horseman and dancer. And so we return his icon to the wall — dusted but undiminished.

In February 1929, the American Art Galleries auctioned a collection of Steuben relics inherited by the family of William North, including his Revolutionary War correspondence, his sword and dress uniform.

Bibliography

Friedrich Wilhelm von Steuben, Ueberhorst, Horst, (Heinz Moos Verlag, München: 1981)

"Inspector General Frederick William Von Steuben, a sketch of his career and personality," by Faust, Albert Bernhardt, ~ Souvenir ~ Steuben SesquiCentennial 1777-1927, November 30, 1927, Madison Square Garden, (Steuben Society of America, Inc.: New York, 1927)

"Baron Steuben's Estate at New Bridge, Bergen County, New Jersey," Linn, William Alexander, Papers and Proceedings of The Bergen County Historical Society 1902-1905, Number One, (Press of the Evening Record: Hackensack, 1905), pp. 20-33; Read at Annual Dinner, February 22, 1904.

"Baron Steuben," Bowen, Francis, The Library of American Biography, Vol. IX, Sparks, James, compiler, (Harper & Brothers: New York, 1836)

General von Steuben, Drillmaster of the Revolution, Huebener, Theodore and Scheiper, Caspar, (Pamphlet), (Literary Society Foundation, New York: c1981), 5 pp.

"Steuben," Von Steuben, Arndt, Fridericus, reprinted in The American Monthly, circa 1917"

General von Steuben, ein deutscher Pionier in den Vereinigten Staaten, Schurz, Carl, (Berlin, 1928)

"Von Steuben Our First 'Top Sergeant'," The New York Times, January 27, 1929

Showalter, Dennis E., The Wars of Frederick the Great, (Longman Publishing: New York, 1996)

William North, United States Senator from New York, addressed a letter (undated) to Benjamin Walker, Hackensack, reporting on Congressional action toward establishing cabinet posts in the first Federal Government. He stated (in part): "Your affair...remains in Status quo. You have five States and Burrell 2. New Hampshire is not yet represented, which has taken one state from him....Lee assures me that you will get it. The New England members try every method to get in their favorite - at present seeing that it is likely to run against them, they have proposed to reconsider their resolve...& make it one department...Even if the Committee should report that the 5 departments should again be consolidated into one, it would not be adopted by Congress, who would be ashamed of such an inconsistent conduct. The only thing they, I mean Committee, who are all N. England men can possibly bring about is to form two departments of the 5 - or rather to split the department into two & in that case their favorite would get one & you the Other...."

